DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 677 EA 020 397

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TITLE An Assessment of Alternative Models for the Delivery of Principal Inservice.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Inservice Education; *Management Development; Models; *Principals; Professional Development; *Professional Training; Public Schools
IDENTIFIERS Networking; *Ohio

ABSTRACT

In an effort to compare five models used in delivering inservice instruction to administrators, a survey questionnaire was developed. The goals were to identify the principals' evaluations and perceptions of these models, to summarize the findings of the study, and to present the implications concerning the design of inservice education and the value of continuing the professional development opportunities. The inservice models included traditional university credit courses, short-term learning institutes sponsored by professional associations or by state education agencies, local school district inservices, and informal networking for personal and professional development. Survey questionnaires were sent to 250 randomly selected elementary and secondary principals in Ohio, of whom 192 (77%) responded. The findings indicate that the least popular model is the university course and the most often attended is the professional association short-term institute. Networking was found to be the most effective approach. Administrators appear to engage in a wide variety of inservice education activities; however, many believe they need to be included in the planning of the programs. Research along these same lines with a larger sample is suggested. Tables of data and references are appended. (LMS)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS FOR THE DELIVERY OF PRINCIPAL INSERVICE

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April, 1988

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AN ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS FOR THE DELIVERY OF PRINCIPAL INSERVICE

The acceptance of the increasingly popular notion that principals do indeed play an important role in fostering more effective educational programs has also led to an appreciation for the fact that building administrators have a genuine need for more effective approaches to continuing professional development. In short, it is understood more and more that providing inservice education for school administrators cannot be viewed as some sort of fanciful "frill." Furthermore, quality inservice education programs require a serious investment of time and thought for preparation and implementation.

There is no shortage of inservice activities that are readily available to practicing school administrators. Numerous opportunities and programs are currently open as forms of administrator inservice and professional development. In an earlier review, Daresh and LaPlant (1983) identified five generic models that are frequently utilized for the delivery of administrator inservice. The first is the traditional model, consisting of credit courses offered by colleges and universities. Next, there are workshops, seminars, and other similar short-term learning programs sponsored by professional associations, and these have been described and more broadly defined as "institutes." A third model is virtually the same as this second institute approach, with the major difference being that sponsorship is from a state education agency. A fourth model is represented by inservice that is provided systematically within a local school district or even individual school through the use of formal, organized courses. This

strategy, similar in many respects to the traditional model, with the exception that there is usually no university involvement and degree credit is not provided, has been given the title of the inservice academy. Finally, administrators also engage frequently in informal networking as a way to continue their personal and professional development. Two assumptions are made relative to these five alternative administrator inservice models. First, they should not be viewed as competitors. Indeed, if an administrator would be able to participate in all approaches, it would be viewed as highly desirable. Second, none of the models is by design necessarily inferior or superior to the other strategies. Each approach enjoys certain strengths and suffers peculiar weaknesses when utilized by different individuals under different circumstances.

While existing descriptions of the five models for the delivery of administrator inservice may be useful in providing some common terms and clarity regarding professional development for school leaders, little is currently known about the extent to which principals and other administrators actually take advantage of these opportunities, or the value that is attached to each alternative approach by participants. In addition, there is a real need to know more about the specific objectives that are sought by principals who engage in one or more of the models.

Accordingly, the specific objectives of this paper are to first, describe a recent study of principals' evaluations and perceptions of the quality of inservice learning experiences which made use of one or more of the identified alternative models for administrator inservice.

Second, major findings from the study are summarized. Finally, implications are suggested as they were derived from the findings of this study. These implications concern the design of inservice education, and also the value of continuing professional development opportunities that are often available to practicing school principals.

This study grew from the desire to learn about principals' perceptions of desirable inservice practices and as a way to gather data that could be used in preparing for a variety of local inservice activities for school principals. It is for this reason that the research described here is limited by the fact that it sought information from a group of administrators in only one state. Nevertheless, the study described would seem to hold promise for looking at the issue of professional development opportunities for building administrators in numerous settings.

Methodology

A survey questionnaire was developed for use in this study and consisted of two parts. The first part sought information concerning background characteristics of respondents, their schools, and their school districts. The second part consisted of a series of questions which asked respondents to indicate which, if any, model of administrator inservice they had followed during the past two years, and also the grade that participants would assign (A, B, C, D, or F) to each of the models insofar as the approaches were perceived to be successful in meeting standards of effective inservice design identified in the

literature (Lawrence, 1974; Daresh & LaPlant, 1984; McComas, 1985). These three criteria were:

1. The extent to which a particular model of administrator inservice provided opportunities for participants to have input into the selection of learning objectives and the design of programs and activities;
2. The likelihood that a particular model would normally allow for two-way communication between inservice providers and participants;
3. The perceived effectiveness of the inservice education model in terms of providing practical information that would help an administrator to carry out his or her daily responsibilities and activities with less difficulty.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the primary purpose they had in selecting a particular inservice model.

Survey questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 250 elementary and secondary school principals in Ohio. One hundred and ninety-two principals (77%) responded. Simple descriptive statistics were calculated to provide the findings listed in this paper.

The study was limited somewhat by the relatively small size of the sample. The number of 250 was selected in the first place because it represented approximately 10% of the total number of principals in the state of Ohio, a number deemed sufficient to provide the data needed to address the primary concerns of this study. The concerns that led to

the original survey were that it could yield findings that could be used in the planning of inservice activities to assist the administrators of a single state. Second, it is anticipated that this study will serve as the basis for additional work that will involve larger, nationwide samples of principals. In earlier work suggesting a research agenda for the study of administrator inservice, Daresh and LaPlant (1985) suggested that a first step in systematic study would be to begin with limited reviews of current inservice practices.

Despite some features of the study that might be classified as limitations, it is important to note that a goal of this work was to look at some issues that will lead to additional research in the future. Thus, the small sample size and the distribution of the survey to a group of principals in but one state appeared justified due to the nature of making use of the findings and conclusions from this one piece of research to generate potential additional questions for analysis.

Findings

The major findings related to principals' perceptions of alternative models utilized in the delivery of inservice education for school principals include the following:

1. The most frequently-utilized model of administrator inservice, as described by the principals in this study, was the short-term institute sponsored by a professional association.

As the information provided in Table I indicates, 89.1% of the 192 principals who responded to this survey indicated that they had participated during the last two years in at least one short-term institute sponsored by a professional association. This may not be terribly surprising in view of the fact that there are so many opportunities available for such activities during a typical school year. Few school administrators are able to go more than a day or so without receiving information regarding workshops, institutes, or seminars that are sponsored by a state, local, or national organization. One thing that may have been interesting to determine is whether principals tended to participate mostly in the activities of national associations, or their local, regional affiliates.

As Table I also indicates, the least popular, or least frequently utilized, model for the delivery of administrator inservice was the traditional university course, with only 60.9% of the respondents participating during the past two years. Two conclusions might be drawn from this finding. One might be that principals simply do not view university courses as viable inservice learning activities. Presumably, school administrators have had considerable exposure to traditional course work while pursuing graduate degrees and preservice administrator preparation programs. The use of university courses as a source of continuing professional development might then not be seen as realistic. If this is indeed the case, one might find that university courses would fare even more poorly if it were understood that in the state used in this study (Ohio), there is a certification requirement

for all educational administrators to return to universities to complete a specified minimal amount of graduate level coursework as part of the licensing renewal process. If the data collected were sensitive enough to indicate the frequency with which principals truly selected the university course voluntarily as a tool of inservice, the record concerning this model may have been much worse.

A second conclusion possible drawn from this finding is that university courses are not always available to princpals who might be seeking inservice education learning opportunities. In addition, even when college and university programs are available nearby, course offerings may not have been sufficiently diverse to meet the perceived needs of practicing school administrators.

TABLE I HERE

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2. The model of networking was said to be the most effective approach to the delivery of administrator inservice, according to the principals included in this study.

In terms of respondents' ratings of the effectiveness of each of the inservice delivery models, the most effective approach in terms of providing for participants' input into the design of programs and activities was networking; the least effective model according to this criterion was the institute sponsored by the state education agency. The most effective model in terms of providing two-way communication

among inservice providers and participants was also the network, and the least effective was, once again, the state education-sponsored institute. Finally, the strategy described as most effective in terms of helping administrators perform their daily responsibilities was also networking. Traditional university courses were viewed as least effective in this regard. (See Table II).

TABLE II HERE

The use of networking is based on the desire of individuals who share common concerns, problems, and potential solutions to problems to come together periodically to discuss matters of mutual concern. It is not surprising, therefore, that this model of administrator inservice would be viewed so positively by practitioners. Nothing in the networking approach suggests that someone tells people what to do, how to do it, or when to do it; it is based on the concept of support and assistance. On the other hand, the models which received a much lower rating from practitioners, namely the institute sponsored by the state education agency and the university class, include a much more prescriptive dimension. What this apparently says is that practitioners value more highly those situations where they can be actively engaged in their own problem-solving processes, without someone else suggesting (or dictating) the one right way to do things.

3. Each of the models of administrator inservice education addressed different and distinct specific goals for participants.

The most popular reason for administrators taking university courses was to meet state department of education licensing and certification requirements. Gaining specific information or developing a particular set of job-related skills was given as the primary goal of principals who participated in institutes and academies. No distinction in this case was made between institutes that were sponsored by professional associations or those sponsored by state education agencies; principals went to these activities with the expectation that they could learn a specific piece of information related to their work. Finally, the opportunity to interact with professional peers was indicated as the most popular reason for people to engage in networking.

Implications and Discussions

Inservice opportunities for school administrators are widely used and apparently readily available for practitioners. Although not a central finding of this study, it was interesting to note that not one of the 192 principals who responded to the study indicated that he or she had not participated in at least one inservice activity during the past two years. From considerable discussions carried out with many other practitioners across the nation, it is likely that a nationwide sample including hundreds or even thousands of other principals, the same type of response could be noted. Simply stated, principals have

access to inservice education opportunities, and they tend to take advantage of these opportunities. It is largely due to this single general observation that the need is made even greater to determine ways which might be found to improve the quality of existing inservice practice. Based on the findings of this study, although limited somewhat by a small sample size and lack of geographic diversity among respondents, there are a number of different suggestions related to the possible improvement of these inservice education opportunities.

First, the findings of this study indicate that administrators currently engage in a wide array of inservice education activities. In fact, most respondents indicated that they recently participated in several different models. Thus, there is a clear ongoing need for school administrators to have opportunities for ongoing and continuing education. As a result, more rather than less opportunity for inservice on a regular basis for school administrators is warranted.

Second, attention needs to be paid to the ways in which school principals as inservice participants may be regularly included in planning the design and selecting the content of inservice, engaging in two-way communication, and gaining insights and valuable information regarding immediate and daily administrative tasks. There has been a rich and consistent set of findings well-developed in the literature and research base related to the general design and implementation of inservice education in schools. There is little doubt, given the enormous number of surveys conducted in recent years and related to inservice participants' expressed needs, that people want to have a voice in the design of learning activities. Also, people want inservice

that can help them cope with immediate problems. These observations are well-founded and cannot continue to be ignored by many of those who plan inservice education for school administrators. Regardless of the individual model used to deliver inservice to school principals, designers and planners need to take into account the realities of effective inservice design. To forget these features almost guarantees a continuing negative appraisal of professional development and continuing education for school administrators.

Third, the findings of this study show that practitioners clearly believe that some models for inservice do not help them. Institutes, particularly those sponsored by state education agencies, are apparently in need of considerable improvement. Perhaps another suggestion might be that state departments of education, often viewed in negative terms by practitioners because of their historic regulatory functions, are not organizations that should attempt to serve as providers of inservice education for school administrators. There is not sufficient data generated through this study to provide a definitive answer, but two alternative explanations are possible. For one thing, principals might be saying that state departments have a legitimate role in providing inservice, but what they do is poorly planned and conducted. On the other hand, principals may be saying that state education agencies should get out of the inservice education business entirely. This latter observation would no doubt be discounted by state education officials who crave the opportunity to see their agencies assume a more proactive and productive role in providing leadership to the schools of their region.

Finally, the single most powerful finding from this study is related to the fact that principals like to work with their colleagues in networking arrangements. As a result, additional opportunities for this type of collegial sharing need to be provided, particularly as these opportunities may be used to foster increased feelings of collaboration and cooperation among administrators. Isolation on the job is one of the most damaging problems faced by professional educators--teachers, administrators, and all personnel who work in schools. The development of, support for, and refinement of networks for school principals may be an important way to change the present norm of separation that currently characterizes much of what goes on in schools.

Summary

This survey of a group of principals across one state provided some important data that has already been used to design additional inservice education opportunities. Preliminary analyses of the evaluation statements by principals participating in recent activities have indicated that there was general agreement that programs did, in fact, reflect the same types of preferences indicated through the findings of this study. Despite this seeming reinforcement of the research conducted here, however, there remains a considerable amount of work that needs to be carried regarding the design of inservice for school administrators.

For one thing, this same survey instrument utilized in this study might be used with a much larger, nationwide sample of school principals. Second, additional analyses can be carried out to determine if selected principals' background characteristics--years of experience, age, sex, type or size of school, for example--may have some relationship to the ways in which inservice is viewed. This is a particularly critical issue to be reviewed in light of the many new principals who will likely be taking positions for the first time during the next few years. Do we need to design specialized learnings for these individuals? Another issue that may need to be explored is the extent to which more intensive, in-depth interviews of selected principals would yield similar results, or at least provide an even richer set of findings than those reported here. For example, this study has shown that principals tend to view state department-sponsored programs negatively. We can only guess why at this point. Additional study would be useful to provide further insights into issues such as this.

Administrator inservice is a field that has not been widely studied. There is little doubt, however, that it is an arena which must be examined carefully in the future if it is to realize its potential for enabling educational leaders to be as effective as they will need to be.

Inservice Model	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
1. Traditional	119	61.4
2. Professional Association Institutes	171	89.1
3. State Education Agency Institutes	137	72.1
4. Academies	164	85.9
5. Networking	117	60.9

TABLE I Principals participating in the five models of administrator inservice (N=192)

	Models	Ratings		
		Input	Two-Way	Effectiveness
1.	Traditional	2.15	2.99	2.49
2.	Professional Association Institutes	2.40	2.94	3.01
3.	State Education Agency Institutes	1.94	2.54	2.70
4.	Academies	2.81	3.13	2.78
5.	Networking	2.96	3.34	3.06

TABLE II Principals' mean score ratings of five models of administrator inservice. (NOTE: This table shows principals' mean score ratings of each of the models of administrator inservice, relative to the criteria of input into selection of inservice objectives, amount of two-way communication between inservice providers and participants, and perception of the effectiveness of models in helping principals carry out their daily responsibilities (Range = 1.0 - 4.0)

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